



Big Idea: LOVE is worth FIGHTING for.

Scripture: Revelation 1:1-2; Revelation 1:3; Revelation 1:17-19; Revelation 2:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:12 (All Scripture appears in the RSV.)

INTRODUCTION

For the next few weeks, we're going to look at one of the most misunderstood, most confusing, and possibly the most argued about book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation. It's been said that if you get a hundred people to each read the entire book, you'll get a hundred and one different opinions on what it all means and what we should do about it.

So, with all that being said, we should probably start at the very beginning, and I'll add a few details as we go:

Revelation 1:1-2 (ESV)

[1] The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, [2] who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Okay, so in these first two verses, we get the most basic of details, but they're actually super important. We find out that the book is written by a man named John "who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ." That actually really narrows it down the possibilities for who could have written the book. Most scholars agree that it was the Apostle John, who was one of Jesus' first twelve disciples.

We also learn that John is about to describe "things that must soon take place," meaning that this book is a book of prophecy. He even makes this case more clearly in verse 3:

Revelation 1:3 (ESV)

[3] Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

TENSION

Now, where things start to get confusing is that there is a lot of disagreement over two very simple words: the word “soon” in verse 1 and the word “near” in verse 3. Some will tell you that the prophecy describes something that was happening around the time that John wrote the book (sometime around the year 66 CE). And some will tell you that it’s actually describing something that is still yet to occur, that describes future events that will signal the end of the world as we know it.

And then some will tell you that more likely, it’s a little bit of both.

And that’s the approach we’re going to take for the next few weeks. We’re going to try to read this book with the understanding that John is writing a letter to very real people who lived in the first century and were experiencing intense persecution and political instability. For example, it’s most likely that just shortly after John wrote the Book of Revelation, the Romans overthrew Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, ushering in an intense period of persecution for the newly formed Christian church.

But so much of what John writes about feels “otherworldly” in a way that might lead us to believe he was also talking about something bigger, something beyond our understanding. As if Jesus Himself, had given John the unique gift of seeing a future that wouldn’t come about for at least 2000 years.

In fact, in the first chapter, John describes meeting Jesus again, even though He had ascended to heaven roughly 30 years earlier. Check out how John describes that conversation:

Revelation 1:17–19 (ESV)

[17] When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, [18] and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. [19] Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

Basically, Jesus told John that he would see and hear some pretty shocking things. But his only job was to write those things down and to make sure that other people, just like you and me, get a chance to read it.

So, let’s do exactly that.

TRUTH

Chapters 2 and 3 make up 7 short letters that Jesus told John to write to seven different churches. We don't have time to look at all seven letters, but we'll look at one tonight, and one next week.

Now, before I read this, I want to remind you that the letter was written to a very real church that was made up of very real people that lived almost 2,000 years ago. But in some ways, it was also written to us. Even though a lot has changed in the last 2,000 years, there is still a lot that we can learn from what Jesus tells John to write down.

So, let's jump into the first church that Jesus told John to write a Letter to. It's the church in Ephesus, which is also the church that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Ephesians to.

Let's read the whole thing, and then we'll come back to any parts that might need a little bit of extra explanation:

Revelation 2:1–7 (ESV)

[1] "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

[2] "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. [3] I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. [4] But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. [5] Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. [6] Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. [7] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

So, to start off, there's actually a lot of good here. In verses 2 and 3, Jesus commends the church for working hard and for testing the teaching of new apostles so that they could figure out who was worth listening to and who should be thrown out.

But then in verse 4 and 5, things took a pretty drastic change. It's like Jesus literally said, "You're cool... but here's something that's just got to change."

Let's actually look back at what He said:

REVELATION 2:4-5 (ESV)

[4] But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. [5] Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

It's interesting to me that Jesus basically said, "You all do all this great stuff in My name... but you have abandoned the love you had at first." Honestly, as I've been trying to reconcile these two things in my mind, I just kept coming up short until it just clicked... **PROM-POSALS!!**

Now, just go with me for a second on this one.

When I was growing up, there were no such things as "prom-posals". If you liked someone enough that you wanted to invite them to go to prom with you, you would spend a week or so just avoiding that person because of crippling anxiety. And then, you'd finally work up enough courage to talk to them, and it would be considered a success if you could just ask, "Will you go to prom with me?" without passing out. And you'd get bonus points if your voice didn't crack.

And sure, it would also be nice if they said yes, but the truth was that your heart was pounding so loudly in your ears that you probably couldn't hear them answer anyway.

But nowadays, things are waaaaaay different. But it starts the same, right? You like someone enough that you want to invite them to prom, but over the past few years, can we just agree that things have gotten a bit out of control? It's become less and less about asking someone you like to prom, and more and more about impressing everyone with how creative you are.



Big Idea: YOU are worth **FIGHTING** for.

Scripture: Revelation 4:1-11 (ESV)

SURFACE:

- Have you ever had a dream or vision that felt incredibly real? What was it about?
- What's the most confusing book or movie you've ever encountered, and what made it so puzzling?

SERIOUS:

- Reread **Revelation 4:1-11**. What (if anything) sticks out to you as:
 - Interesting?
 - Confusing?
 - Surprising?
- How does John's description of God's throne room compare to you imagine heaven to be like?
- During the message, [speaker's name], mentioned that "God isn't just good, He's holy." How would you describe the difference between these two ideas? How would you explain the difference to someone who has never been to church before?

SPIRITUAL:

- What are some ways that you can go out of your way to remember (or even celebrate) the three big takeaways that [speaker's name] mentioned from this passage?
 - God is worthy of worship.
 - God is powerful.
 - God isn't just good, He's holy.

PRAYER

- How can we, as a group, pray for each other this week?

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